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A.NOLEN

Assaulting Mt. Helicon: Writing and Current Affairs.

monthly archives: NOVEMBER 2012

HAUNT, PART II

Part II of a serialized fiction story, read part I here.

"I'll give her a bottle and we can leave," Fiona already had the formula heating on the stove. She watched quietly as the glass bottle sweated. Before the troubles with her pregnancy began, Fiona's doctor told her that a baby should have at least six months of breast-milk: "It helps them develop patience," he said. Fiona wanted to nurse Elsie, but her depression medicine made that impossible. She felt that she'd let her child down. Timothy watched his wife as the bottle heated; he knew that she was thinking about the formula. *Don't let it get to you*, he thought.

Glug, glug- the bottle began to dance in its bath. Fiona tested the formula on her wrist, "It's ready, has Elsie been 'diaped" she asked. *No sign of heavy thoughts.*

"Yes," Timothy was relieved, "yes, that's all done."

Fiona was a slight woman with blond hair; her family had farmed the region for almost as long as Timothy's. In Llywellyn, where Tim was born, everybody knew everyone else, and Fiona's people were respected. The ones who weren't successful farmers had become lawyers, doctors or teachers, like Fiona had been. She'd worked at the Montessori school in Madison, but gave all that up when Elsie arrived.

Tim made an excellent match with Fiona, an appropriate match. No one was surprised to hear of Tim's success in Chicago, the Davies never disappoint, and more than a few women in the area set their scopes on Timothy when he moved back to town. But none of these women had what Fiona had: Tim and Fiona were part of the gentry, a circle of families that became smaller and smaller each generation as children moved out of town to Chicago or the coasts. Timothy and Fiona *understood* each other; as well as they understood the parks, trails and forests where they played growing up.

The coupling was perfect, except for one thing. While Tim's family and friends were pleased at the match, they had long enough memories to have some reservations also. "Be careful, Tim," his Aunt Margo told him after the engagement, "I love Fiona, I have since she was a little girl. But the Rogers, well, they can go funny."

Tim blew this advice off. Everybody knew about Fiona's mother, who would stay in bed for months before her treatments. Fiona's maternal grandfather and an uncle had also 'needed help,' as people called it. *But the other half of her family is fine*, Timothy told himself, *Besides, I love her. She's like me- she remembers what I remember and sees things the way I do. She's a part of me whatever happens.* Tim understood the value of Fiona; he hadn't always, and it made him shutter to think that if he'd met her ten years earlier, even five years earlier, he'd have let her slip away. Back then, he was hunting for someone else, someone like a younger version of Lillian.

"Is there a way to strap Elsie into that carriage thing?" Fiona asked. Her question broke the train of Tim's thoughts.

"Oh! Yeah. Yes there is, right here." He scooped the squirming bundle out of his wife's arms and buckled Elsie in, securing the straps one by one.

"I thought that we'd take the mill road," Tim said.

"I love that road. You know they're restoring the ice house next to the mine."

"Hm. I hope that they do a good job. It would be a shame to

it too much."

"It's going to be a 'biker's waypost'; probably a tourist trap." Hordes of would-be cyclists descended on Llywellyn in the summer; most came from Madison. They clogged the roads and paths, jarring end elbowing each other, poured into bright Lycra suits. That crowd was a nightmare; but a well-heeled nightmare.

"Ugh." Tim thought this, but Fiona said it.

They didn't have to worry about bikers that day. It was early Autumn, and the weather was changeable enough to discourage townies. Timothy and his wife peddled along the mill road, its cobbles whirring under the wheels of their bikes. The road was laid in the 1840s, when the local lead mill was at peak production, and it connected every building important to nineteenth century life: the town hall, the old school, the mill, the icehouse and the mine. Beautiful granite cobbles set in a sweeping, fan-pattern. Over a hundred freezing winters hadn't shaken them out of order. Tim had traveled to London, Brussels, Paris and Prague- many places while studying. Each of these cities had roads like the mill road, but never with the open, clean feeling of this way through the forest.

"It's like a painting, Fi!" Tim shouted above the rush of wind in his ears. She smiled back. Elsie was asleep in the trailer; the golden points of light on the trees, the white field astors, the chicory, all sped by without her notice.

The paving ended at the icehouse, which was not much more than a shack over a tapped-out mineshaft. *A perfect spot to sell Gatorade*, Tim thought, *I wonder how they'll discourage the Madisonites from splunking.*

Llywellyn's leadworks used a deep stream to wash and crush the ore; the stream twisted around the barred entrance to the shafts. Tim knew of a good picnicking spot along its bank: where the water-wheel was once anchored, but was now covered in grass. The pair dismounted and guided their bikes the short distance to the bank. Elsie woke up and began to cry.

"It's okay honey, were at the picnic spot." She didn't stop crying until Fiona picked her up and showed her the different types of wildflower that were growing along the stream.

"Are these chicory or corn-flower, Tim?" his wife called out. Tim was busy setting out their blankets, "Chicory this time of year." Elsie had squirmed out of her mother's arms and toddled over to the purple flower. She stripped it of leaves and petals in one swift grab.

"Oh God, is it poisonous?!" Fiona scrambled to pull every bit of plant from her daughter's fingers.

"No, honey. They used to use it for coffee. It's fine. Keep her away from the nightshade- that one there, with the deep-red berries. That's the only one we have to worry about." Tim pulled his bike and the carriage along side the blankets, so that Elsie could nap safely after lunch. The chicory had spooked Fiona, and she brought Elsie back to the blanket, where the baby played between her reclining parents until lunch as eaten and she was dozy enough to nap.

"Would you zip her into the trailer, Tim?" Fiona's eyelids were already heavy, her head rested on her outstretched arm.

"No problem," Elsie was stowed inside her pumpkin; within moments Tim heard her breathing become soft and regular. He peaked in: Elsie slept on her tummy with her knees tucked under and rear poking up in the air. *How can that be comfortable?* Tim smiled, pulled her blanket over his daughter and zipped her back up.

Timothy sat between his sleeping wife and child. The forest had a slow, dream-like feel around him, but instead of lulling him to sleep, the languid vibe made Tim feel trapped, like he had to do something to break free.

"I'll be right back. I want to check the stream for threeridges," he whispered to his wife, who may or may not have heard him. Timothy remembered finding these crinkled clam-shells in the mine-stream as a boy; their mother-of-pearl was like black opal, or the aurora borealis in lavender and green. *Will I be lucky like that again?*

Tim removed his shoes and slipped his feet into the cold water. Swish… swish… every step was a fight against the current, the slimy rocks tickled the soles of his feet, the water gurgled around his ankles like the sound of the rain around the windows of the apartment on Lincoln Park West…

"I'm sure that there's some way to come up with the money." An ivory hand flourished from a velvet sleeve.

"I have the property that my parents left to me, but if the gallery goes under, I'll loose it. I don't want to risk everything." Tim swirled the coffee grounds at the bottom of his brightly-colored demitasse. It was a strange cup, not quite garish but not quite tasteful, either. *Gold rims and classical figures,* he thought then looked over at his hostess, *My cup has a blue background, but hers is burnt orange. Russian? Curious.*

"Oh,darling," she smiled, "I don't think we'll need to borrow much money. Have you been published?"

"Only in the graduate journal."

"Well, that's something. I'm sure we can get at least ten thousand for a rewrite of that- let my friend Arthur have a look at it," she refilled his cup, "And your own painting?"

"Amateurish at best."

"Even better! Grants for developing artists have very few hoops to jump through- if you know where and when to apply." Lillian shot Tim a little smile. "You see," she continued, "Fate brought you to me."

What brought Timothy to Lillian's apartment that afternoon was a mutual acquaintance in the Art History Department at the University of Chicago. Timothy's thesis adviser had been roped into a dance recital by his significant other, who in turn, was one of Lillian's proteges.

"Oh my God, Tim!"

"What is it Pete?"

"I don't know what I'm going to do. I can't go, today, I just can't!" Pete had over-committed himself again, and was scheduled to hear a thesis defense that afternoon. The professor shuffled papers around his office nervously.

"I don't want to offend her, nobody wants to offend her…"

Tim found it painful to see a grown man squirm like Pete was squirming; he felt compelled to end the professor's misery: "How can I help?"

Naturally, Timothy could help by going in his adviser's stead.

Tim found himself seated in the front row of a very modern, very confusing performance- clearly the artist was full of angst, full of longing, full of *something* as he writhed on the stage. Perhaps Tim's confusion showed on his face, because before the twisting and stomping was done, an older lady in velvet, who smelled of myrrh and magnolia, was whispering into his left ear.

"Now, you see, he is breaking with his past self…"

"Pulled by conflicting desires…"

"That, that represents shame."

The movements, as she explained them, started to make some sense. Instead of amused disbelief, Tim began to feel interested in what this thin, muscular man on stage was trying to say. Timothy was pulled outside of himself for a few moments; then the stage brightened and the dancer exited.

"Well, what did you think?" the velvet lady asked him.

"I think it must be exhausting to be him." The woman rocked her head back and laughed deeply. Tim noticed that the people seated around them laughed with her; in fact, their full attention was focused on her and what she would do next.

"Honestly, that's the best description of his work I've heard yet. He's my pupil." The onlookers fixed Tim in a jealous stare. "Come to tea with me, what's you name?"

His name was Tim and hers was Lillian. He followed her home for tea, which was brought in on silver trays by a middle-aged woman in a uniform. Lillian asked Tim questions about himself.

"Well, that 's the thing. Alex and I would like to start our own gallery- showcasing local talent. Talent that is inspired by Bouguereau, the Pre-Raphaelites, the talent that doesn't get its share of exhibitions, or reviews…" Tim was getting quite heated now and Lil liked it.

"So you need money to start a gallery to sell your school-friends' work here in town, where it's being painted?"

"Yes, exactly that. There's a market- they have buyers already, but they get very limited exposure. And the overhead is so high. We could do a lot better by them."

"Do you have any investors?" she asked.

Alex and Tim did have one investor, Alex's father in Schaumburg.

"We have one, but he doesn't share our vision."

"I see. What is his vision?" Lillian had Tim fixed with her large, beautiful eyes and she hung on his words. Alex's father's vision: Timothy groaned inwardly.

Alex's mother and father were art dealers; but they were the type who source work for hotels, chain restaurants and conference centers. If you've been to a McDonald's with bright montages on the walls, the chances are the Greenes sold them, frames included. Alex would be the first to admit that his parents didn't have the polish necessary to scale the heights of retail art; but they did have a lot of money.

"Local artists charge local prices, Alex," his father was busy unpacking some crates in the family living room. There was plastic over the cushions on the couch. "That organic bullcrap- that's the sort of thing you can do a couple of galleries down the line. What you want now is cheap and cheerful, believe me. Quick turnover."

"So, how much are you willing to put up, if we follow you advice and sell Chinese art?"

His father considered, "Two grand a month."

"That's not going make a dent in anything!"

"Oh, ho. It's something, it's two grand you're not going to have to borrow retail."

"It doesn't even cover half of advertizing."

"What? You want to be a boy all your life? Have people say you only made it because you're Greene's son?" Alex doubted that anyone would ever say that, but he kept his mouth shut. A knock on the door cut the tension in the room.

"Not now May," the elder Greene snapped. Alex turned around, a

young Chinese woman stood in the doorway, she stared at him with her mouth slightly open and chin puckered, as though she was both interested and afraid.

“Hello, I’m Alex Greene.”

“Yes, hello,” she answered with a few shallow bobs of her head and that same wide-eyed stare.

“Do you work with my father?”

“Yes.”

“What is your area of professional expertise?” The girl didn’t answer, but grimaced and nodded more.

‘How long have you been here?” Alex asked.

“May’s been helping me since this spring. Thank you, May,” his father interjected and the girl left.

“Does mom know about her?”

“Of course she does. Besides, I got her an apartment near Argyle street. She’s not bothering anyone. I want 15% of your capital, non-dilutable, with first rights to sell.”

“You’ll give some stranger and apartment but you won’t give family a decent deal.” Having met May, Alex knew he had something to work with.

“I’m only going to charge you base.”

“I get the first year interest free, then I’m paying you base rate.” Alex’s father smiled, in truth, he had a great deal of confidence in his son.

“Fine. It’s a deal. Now either help me unpack or get out of here…”

Timothy turned his eyes back to his shockingly-blue demitasse and swirled his coffee grounds a few more times. “Alex’s father’s ideas are very commercial. He wants us to buy art cheaply in China- I’m sure you know what artists live on over there- then sell it downtown for American prices.” Tim waited for some disapproving utterance from Lillian.

“I believe that Papa Greene is absolutely right.” She bit into a small almond biscuit from a tray beside her.

“What?”

“He’s absolutely right. You’re so young, Tim, you don’t have any patience.”

“We want to start this gallery to promote work that has been…”

“Yes, yes. But you need money to do it. That’s why you’re here talking to me, isn’t it? Be reasonable. There will be time enough for conviction once you can pay your own bills. Maria! Maria we need more coffee…”

The whine of a siren broke Tim’s train of thought. He glanced up at the grassy bank: Fiona and Elsie were standing there, looking at him. Fiona’s face was grey and shiny; Elsie was crying. Somewhere behind them red lights were flashing.

“What’s wrong, honey?” Tim tried to take a step towards his family, but he went crashing down, face-first, into the stream. He couldn’t feel his feet- they were like lumps of dead meat on the end of his legs.

Tim pushed his head out of the water and gasped for air; now his Aunt Margo was running toward the bank, followed by two paramedics with silver blankets. *What the hell….*

“Pull him out of the water!” The two men grabbed Tim’s arms and lifted him to the grass; they wrapped him in the blankets and put something rubbery around his feet, which started to burn.

“My god! What is that- take it off! It burns, take it off!” Tim tried to squirm out from under the blankets but the paramedics held him down.

“Sir! Lie still, it’s not burning, you’re freezing.” Tim looked around frantically for his wife and child- one minute ago they were sleeping and now this? The pain in his legs seared him. *Where are they?* All Tim could see were large men in navy uniforms, space-age silver and the high, cold, blue sky.

“Get his core temperature; the pulse is irregular. We need him in the ambulance, quickly.”

“Has your husband ingested anything, like drugs or alcohol?”

“Hey Fiona, come here! What happened?”

Fiona could hardly get out the words: “I don’t know- you wouldn’t talk, you didn’t look yourself…”

“Ma’am we need to take him in, just follow the ambulance. You two can talk at the hospital. Sir, lie quietly and try to get warm. You’re in shock.”

Part III

LEAVE A COMMENT

PERVERSE MOVIES

A battle rages across the internet… the problem:

There's an editor in Niagara Falls who won't publish movie reviews that he doesn't like.

Imagine that- an editor exercising editorial control. But as you may have guessed, editorial control is not the real problem. The real problem is that Frank Parlato won't publish reviews of movies that he finds morally objectionable. In his own words:

> *In an interview with the Star, Parlato repeated that he did not support "gender-bashing" of either sex. "I'm in favour of strong men and strong women. I don't think that they have to be in competition or one has to be belittled in order to elevate the other," he said.*

and

> *"It is the right of Hollywood to market promiscuous sex, violence and profanity, not only to adults but to adolescents," he said. "I operate a small newspaper in Niagara Falls and it is my right not to review Hollywood movies."*

and

> *"I might remind the reader that the email does not say I would not consider reviews of films where men and women are both shown in an inspiring light. I am simply not interested in films that demean men, or men of a particular race. I am also equally uninterested in publishing reviews of films that demean women," he wrote.*

"The email" in question is one which Parlato sent to his personal acquaintance, Michael Calleri. Parlato wouldn't publish Calleri's review of *Snow White and the Huntsman* or *Headhunters*, because Parlato thought these two movies demeaned men. Calleri then published Parlato's (private) email through Roger Ebert's column in the *Chicago Sun-Times*, under the title: 'Reactionary Men Who Fear and Hate Strong Women'.

A more appropriate title would have been, "Reactionary Critics Who Fear and Hate Opinions Not Their Own". Naturally, *Jezebel* and all the other acolytes smelt a chance to prove their 'revolutionary' (in truth, conformist) credentials by drawing knives for Editor Parlato. Their charge: Frank Parlato is attacking freedom of speech and women's rights.

With that logic, any time an editor refuses to publish something, he's attacking free speech. Any time a feminist viewpoint is challenged, society is in danger of reverting to something like Afghanistan.

The hysteria coming from outlets like *Jezebel*, *Backlot Bitch* (and others that rank way, way lower in my Google search) reminds me of a witch-hunt or the Inquisition; both events that feminists should be sensitive to repeating, because they involved silencing people with opinions that did not mirror those of the powerful. Are you listening? (I bet *Backlot Bitch* is just happy to be included in that sentence.)

What possessed you, Ebert, to lend your name to this small-town squabble? Not only do you have egg on your face, but you've showed your profession to be one filled with hypocritical, dishonorable shills, who'll do anything to lick Hollywood's rear? You've unmasked the machine- *that's bad for you*. A paper with a circulation of 20,000 is bucking the Tinseltown monolith- are you really that scared?

Clearly Ebert, and the people who made him, really are that scared.

What justification did Frank Parlato give for his decision not to print Calleri's work?

> *Michael; I know you are committed to writing your reviews, and put a lot of effort into them. it is important for you to have the right publisher. i may not be it. i have a deep moral objection to publishing reviews of films that offend me. snow white and the huntsman is such a film. when my boys were young i would never have allowed them to go to such a film for i believe it would injure their developing manhood. if i would not let my own sons see it, why would i want to publish anything about it?*
>
> *snow white and the huntsman is trash. moral garbage. a lot of fuzzy feminist thinking and pandering to creepy hollywood mores produced by metrosexual imbeciles.*
>
> *I don't want to publish reviews of films where women are alpha and men are beta.*
>
> *where women are heroes and villains and men are just lesser versions or shadows of females.*
>
> *i believe in manliness.*
>
> *not even on the web would i want to attach my name to snow white and the huntsman except to deconstruct its moral rot and its appeal to unmanly perfidious creeps.*

i'm not sure what headhunter has to offer either but of what I read about it it sounds kind of creepy and morally repugnant.

with all the publications in the world who glorify what i find offensive, it should not be hard for you to publish your reviews with any number of these.

they seem to like critiques from an artistic standpoint without a word about the moral turpitude seeping into the consciousness of young people who go to watch such things as snow white and get indoctrinated to the hollywood agenda of glorifying degenerate power women and promoting as natural the weakling, hyena -like men, cum eunuchs.

the male as lesser in courage strength and power than the female.

it may be ok for some but it is not my kind of manliness.

If you care to write reviews where men act like good strong men and have a heroic inspiring influence on young people to build up their character (if there are such movies being made) i will be glad to publish these.

i am not interested in supporting the reversing of traditional gender roles.

i don't want to associate the Niagara Falls Reporter with the trash of Hollywood and their ilk.

it is my opinion that hollywood has robbed america of its manliness and made us a nation of eunuchs who lacking all manliness welcome in the coming police state.

now i realize that you have a relationship with the studios etc. and i would have been glad to have discussed this in person with you to help you segue into another relationship with a publication but inasmuch as we spent 50 minutes on the phone from paris i did not want to take up more of your time.

In short i don't care to publish reviews of films that offend me.

if you care to condemn the filmmakers as the pandering weasels that they are…. true hyenas.

i would be interested in that….

Frank

I'm an educated woman with a degree in Applied Math. I don't find Frank offensive, I think that he makes a number of good points. However, I've made my opinion known already, after I got my fingers burned with *Brave*.

The real story here is about one man with conviction who is bucking the trend; a David who has taken on the Media/Marketing/Movie-Making Goliath. Calleri and Ebert's freakout shows just how precarious they feel their position is; after all, how do you defend the indefensible? How do you claim to be progressive and forward-thinking, while at the same time using your power to crush people whose opinions you don't like? How do you keep your sanity while living a life so rife with hypocrisy? Booze and busy-work, probably.

To Mr. Parlato and his advertisers: The *Niagara Falls Reporter* now has a circulation of 22,000 + 1.

And guess what? I'll stop reading *Niagara Falls Reporter* when and if I find it lacking. Because as little-guy readers, we all have that power, which maybe is what Ebert and his ilk are really afraid of…

LEAVE A COMMENT

ULTRASUEDE

The 1970s: When Rome was Burning.

I don't know anything about the 1970s; I was born in the 1980s. But my impression of the '70s is one of impending doom, like a drunken party dancing the tarantella on the edge of a cliff.

Imagine my surprise to hear Billy Joel confirm my prejudices: "It was a big party. They talk about the stories of Hitler's bunker at the end of the war. Everybody was drinking champagne, everybody was bopping everybody else in the bunker, because the Russians were going to come any second. Well, there was a sense of that in New York."

Interesting metaphor, Mr. Joel. But, who am I to argue? Billy wasn't around for the conquest of Berlin, but he was in NYC during the '70s.

Ultrasuede: In Search of Halston is a documentary about the designer Roy Halston Frowick, who made shirt-dresses and monochromatic outfits chic for women. I'd never heard of him before stumbling on this film, but he's the guy who designed Jackie O's pillbox hat. Halston's style is what I would call "Charlie's Angels", but that's because I'm too young to know any better. His star on Fashion Avenue reads: "The Seventies belong to Halston".

So who is this guy? A kid from Des Moines, Iowa who talked like a cross between Vincent Price and Ben Stein, and who never went anywhere without an entourage of girls (including Angelica Houston) all dressed in matching outfits. Halston hung out with people like Liza Minelli, Liz Taylor, Andy Warhol, Victor Hugo (not the writer, the Rojas one) and even Truman Capote. (I guess Halston made a splash at Truman's facelift-unveiling party. Yeah.)

This documentary is strange in itself. The interviewer/creative voice is Whitney Sudler-Smith (son of Patrica Altschul- yes, that's why); a 41 year-old screenwriter who decided to make this film because he enjoys dressing nice, as well as watching *Smokey and the Bandit*.

"Kenihavanotha cappuccino, pleeeese."

The weirdness doesn't stop with Smokey. Sudler-Smith credits André Leon Talley with motivating this film. (You know André, he's Anna Wintour's fat crony who plays tennis with a Louis Vuitton suitcase). This accreditation is odd, because the two men seem hostile towards each other. I should say, they seem hostile towards each other *until* fifteen minutes into the film, when Sudler-Smith's 'Dixieland' ringtone interrupts Talley mid-sentence, after which Talley melts like butter. If you have to ask, you can't afford it.

So, these are the characters who want to make a documentary on Halston, who, if nothing else, was a marketing genius. Liza Minelli: "He made it in New York because he understood what people needed… he used to say that you've got to fuck them up." She goes on to credit Halston with developing the bias-cut, which I understood that Madeleine Vionnet pioneered in the 1920s, but whatever.

Halston threw huge parties at Studio 54, the disco Mecca, with thousands of dollars worth of orchids, drugs, groupies, yachts, planes… sunglasses. Everything was over-the-top and decadent; everything 'Freakout', trust-fund, yada yada.

So how did it end? In cardboard boxes. Scrapbooks in a windowless room at the Lipscomb University College of Bible and Ministry, deep in Nashville, Tennessee; Lipscomb hosts the *only* Halston archive. Sudler-Smith doesn't miss the irony of a Studio-54-god being memorialized at a 'College of Bible'. (The archives were donated by a very bitchy, very demanding, very surgically-enhanced Georgette Mosbacher, after she bought what was left of Halston's company.)

Halston was riding high until he overexposed himself through numerous licensing deals. (Deals where he sold his name so that it could be used to brand carpet, J.C. Penny clothes, etc.) But, that shouldn't detract from the fact that he was 'first' for a number of things: Halston went to China (like Nixon) to open up Chinese manufacturing for American clothing makers. He pioneered going 'down-market' at Penny's; a move that cost him his Bergdorf-Goodman account… those snobby New Yorkers, eh? Now, of course, everybody's doing it.

So Halston was an innovator, but perhaps not an innovator who made the world a better place.

What undid Halston, we're told, was that his brand was bought by a Mayonnaise conglomerate, which cut his orchid budget too drastically to sustain his creative spirit. The story's a little more interesting than that.

How ironic that Sudler-Smith's stepdaddy, Arthur Altschul, was part of the corporate takeover phenomenon that crushed Halston and made a bad name for licensing. In fact, daddy's company, Goldman Sachs, was pretty much the nexus of the takeover phenomenon: remember folks, it's all about who can get the credit.

Halston wasn't the only big name to burn his fingers on licensing and takeovers. Gloria Vanderbilt was stung by poor licensing choices too; in fact, you can buy her clothes next to the chicken feed at our local Farm & Fleet retailer. (Yes, the *chicken feed*, Gloria.)

Halston's creative freedom was stifled by corporate budgets and small minds; he quit designing and started to take a lot of drugs. Halston died of AIDS-related cancer at 57. He reminds me of a Truman Capote who knew how to make his own money; Halston had all the Truman-esque moral decrepitude: "You are as good as the people you dress."

I liked this documentary. There's something about Sudler-Smith that is engagingly honest– he can afford to tell something like the truth; and even André Leon becomes a known quantity, which is both pathetic and endearing. It's also touching to see the models, designers- people who where once so beautiful- become old and jowly. (The ones who are still living, of course.)

Some critics panned this documentary, because they didn't like its superficiality. I believe that Sudler-Smith quietly mocks the values and people associated with the *very* superficial cultural phenomenon that Halston embodied. Whitney's got a 'Dixieland' ringtone, for Christ's sake!

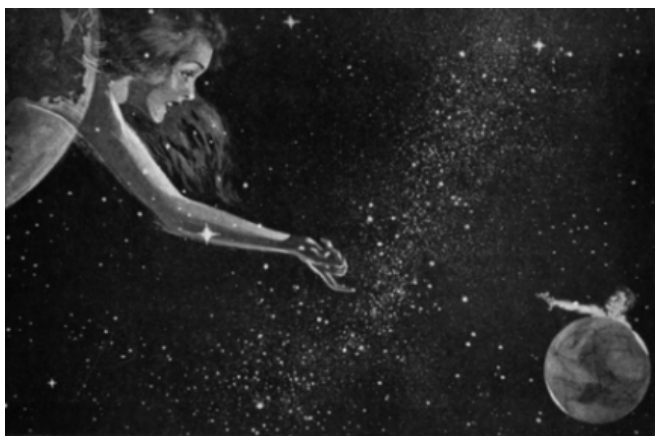
This film is Sudler-Smith's answer to Sherman's march.

I'm left feeling that my preconceptions about the 1970s were accurate; it's not a world that I'd like to be a part of. I'll let Billy Joel have the last word on that era:

> *"In New York especially there was a sense of potential impending disaster. The crime rate was high. There was drugs being dealt right out there in the street. A lot of prostitution. We'd just ended the war in Vietnam, you know, there was the Nixon debacle. Everybody was cynical.*
>
> *There was a blackout. I think it was in '77. I was in Lincoln Center… we were watching Bos Kegs [?– 'rg' suggests 'Bos Kegs' should be 'Boz Scaggs'. -anolen] . We were sitting there and he was going "Lido.. oh oh ey oh.." and the whole thing just dies. It was just chaos. Cars were on fire. People started directing traffic in the middle of the intersection. Shit hit the fan. There was a sense of impending doom."*

2 COMMENTS

DYSTOPIAN SEX



"How was it for you?!"

A little while ago, I posted about Jerome K. Jerome's landmark essay, *The New Utopia*. That little writ inspired Zamyatin's *We*, Huxley's *Brave New World* and Orwell's *1984*.

Each one of these books deals with sex in a different way, but if memory serves me correctly, Orwell's book takes the most radical stand on sex. In Orwell's vision of the future, the State tries to abolish orgasms. Big Brother wants to take away the pleasure of sex.

In *The New Utopia*, *We* and *Brave New World*, sex is either not mentioned or is a distracting, healthful amusement that is sanctioned by the state.

The difference between 1984 and the rest is important, because Orwell's book has the last word amongst classic dystopian novels:

1. *The New Utopia*, J. K. Jerome, essay published 1891.

2. *We*, Yevgeny Zamyatin, published 1924 (in English).

3. *Brave New World*, Aldous Huxley, 1932.

4. *1984*, George Orwell, 1949.

There are others, like Jack London, who've written dystopian novels; but I think it's safe to say that Orwell's has had the greatest impact of any of them. Therefore, his radical departure from the pack regarding the use of sex is interesting.

According to Jerome K. Jerome, whose work I think is the most thoughtful, the loss of sexual freedom doesn't even rate mentioning. When the family, love, gender and intellect are denied, the loss of one's sex life is small fry. In *The New Utopia*, copulation is organized by the state for reproduction, nothing more.

Twenty years later, after the Bolshevik Revolution, after Bela Kun and the disaster in Hungary, Zamyatin sees sex very differently. "Behind the green wall" where life is ordered according to the Guardians, citizens can apply to have sex with whomever they wish to. The government either approves or denies the application; if it's granted, the initiator gets a "pink ticket" from their partner's book- good for one half hour with the shades drawn.

Sex is only about physical pleasure in Zamyatin's dystopia; there's no monogamy, no emotion- except maybe the warm feeling between acolytes of the math-cult. If a couple breeds without being approved as breeding-stock, then the woman is crushed to death.

However, like in *The New Utopia*, there are no families behind the green wall. The state raises children while breeders breed and players play. Love is something that only foolish women do; unless one is unlucky enough to accidentally contract a soul…

I am in the process of re-reading *Brave New World* and *1984*; I will summarize their views on sex when I've finished them. But in the mean time, it's worth considering that perhaps sex is overblown in modern life: perhaps all the energy expended on sexual politics, whether one's experience of sex is as good as it could be, one's sexual prowess… maybe all these things are just distractions from what is really important; distractions from the really important issues that Jerome listed in his four-page essay; The important things that Zamyatin's hero, D-503, searches for.

Where does it all end, Mr. Jerome?

Everyone with black hair, everyone with standard intelligence (or failing that, made stupider through surgery), everyone with the same last name, everyone speaking slang… men and women identical save for the number around their neck.

> *"Can a man emigrate into any other country?" I asked; "it doesn't matter what country — any other country would do."*
>
> *"Oh, yes, if he likes," replies my companion; "but why should he? All lands are exactly the same. The whole world is all one people now – one language, one law, one life."*

Let's get together and feel alright!

No, no, no. I'm lying. It doesn't end this way.

The New Utopia ends when Mr. Jerome wakes up and realizes that he's smoked too many cigars. *We* ends with the Guardians' power crumbling. *Humanity wins in the end…*

But will Big Brother take such insolence lying down? Stay tuned! Part II.

LEAVE A COMMENT

HAUNT

The time has come to start a new fiction serial. I'm trying something more ambitious this time, we'll see…

***

Timothy sliced through the mango, cutting it up into easily-crushed cubes. *Orange, banana, mangoes*, he thought, *all of Elsie's favorites*.

"Come here, Elsie," Timothy's daughter was pulling at the vent-cover underneath the kitchen sink; a cast-iron cover worked with curling flowers that tinkled as the baby shook it. "That's dirty. Here, try a piece of mango."

The young girl crawled over to her father and hoisted herself to a standing position using his trouser leg. He popped the fruit into her mouth, "What do you think of that, honey?" A look of intense concentration passed across her face, until the sweetness of the mango hit. She smiled and cried out for more. "Here's another piece, the rest are for the picnic. Let's go see mommie."

Timothy hoisted Elsie in one arm and carried her up the farmhouse stairs; past the jeweled glass of great-grandma's favorite window; past the pictures of dead family members along the hallway; into her parent's bedroom where his wife lay under the covers, face turned from the door.

"Honey, I thought you'd be up by now. Did you take your medicine yet?"

"I don't think I can go today," Fiona, Tim's wife, spoke without moving. The wooden room creaked as the central heating clicked on.

Timothy had been through this before. "You know that you'll feel better once you get outside." He was confident that his wife would eventually change her mind; her depression had improved after they changed doctors a few months ago. Timothy set down his daughter next to the bed and opened the blinds: soft sunlight fell over the counterpane. Elsie began to tug on the bed sheets, the vent covers started to rattle and the room felt warm.

Elise's birth was a difficult one. First there was the Down's syndrome scare, which turned out to be a lab error; then came Fiona's panic attacks, which she treated with more doctors, herbalists and medicines. Finally, in her third trimester, Fiona developed hypertension. Tim suspected that the extra herbs and drugs had something to do with it.

After the delivery Fiona was listless; Tom chucked it up to exhaustion. She spent long periods in bed- just as the midwife told her to do- but after a couple of weeks his wife showed no sign of her usual spark. All she wanted to do was sleep, and sometimes she cried when she woke up.

Timothy had hoped that Fiona's trouble would end with the birth; that her funk would burn itself out after she'd had time to recover. He didn't count on the sleepless nights; the constant cleaning; the colic. He told himself that Fiona was improving right up until the day when he came home from work to find that Elsie had never been taken out of her crib; that she was hungry and plastered in her own mess.

“Fiona- did you leave her here all day?”

“What?”

“Elsie! I found her in her bed crying- didn’t you hear her?” Fiona just started to weep.

Timothy took time off work to care for them both. There were times when he felt that their wooden house was just a sinking ship, rattling awake each morning with a tepid groan.

But that was six months ago, and today they had a lot to be thankful for. He could go back to work, albeit part-time. Fiona was re-emerging: yesterday, she’d prepared fried chicken and coleslaw for their picnic. He’d even heard her chuckle while she did it. There had been no more neglect of Elsie; the dread that spread over him every day when he left for the office was subsiding. He knew that he could trust his wife again.

Timothy packed the chicken and salad carefully, as well as Elsie’s fruit chunks and animal crackers. He wrapped up a few bottles of shandy too; it wasn’t a drink that he liked, but Fiona did, and it was safe with her medicine. He bundled all this into the basket on his bicycle, then started to attach Elsie’s carriage to the rear wheel. That carriage, with it’s orange canvas and reflective caution sign, was a goodbye-present from his partner at the gallery in Chicago. *Just what a yuppie needs in the country*, Timothy thought when he unwrapped the gift, but he knew that Alex meant well. After all, Alex was from Schaumburg.

The orange trailer was supposed to lock on to the wheel easily with a ‘universal coupler'; but, of course, the coupler wasn’t universal enough to include Timothy’s bike. *I’ll jerry-rig it with some wire and a couple of metal ties.* He was tightening the wire around the wheel-center when his hand slipped, and line of dark blood fell from his finger over his palm.

That rich, velvety, ox-blood red against his skin…

“Let me take you to the car, Lillian,” Timothy bounded to the side of an aging lady, who wilted next to a marble column in the bright foyer. His shoes tapped lightly on the parquet.

“You’re beautiful, Tim, just beautiful!”

“We couldn’t have done any of it without you, Lil. You’re the star of the hour.”

A knowing smile flashed on the woman’s face, her pink lips and perfect white teeth glittered in the chandelier’s light. She was in her fifties, but Lillian still had the statuesque figure that made her famous. Her velvet skirt clung to her in rich folds- like the curtains on a stage- she still had perfect legs. Tim caught her in his arms and she rested the full length of her body against him as he half-walked, half-carried her to the limo waiting outside. She whispered soft things into his ear as they negotiated the stone steps leading down to the street.

“You are?” Tim smiled, “You will?” She was getting heavy.

Tim opened the door to the limo with his free hand and gently scooped her inside. While he was bent over her, her loose-fitting gold sweater shifted from her shoulder. A blood-red ribbon showed across her back. She caught him staring.

“They’re Italian. In Italy, your lover gives you a set like that on New Year’s.” Lillian’s hand lingered on the young man’s arm. “Why don’t you come with me tonight?”

Why didn’t Tim? At twenty-eight, he was already co-owner of the city’s premiere art gallery. He was a multimillionaire on paper. He had these things because of Lillian’s patronage. Tim and Alex, his business partner, would never have got the capital- or, more importantly- the credibility, had she not lent her Rolodex and drawing room to the endeavor.

And Tim could have so much more. If he went home with her, he knew that he would never have to leave. She was rich, and connected far outside of Chicago. Her atelier launched many of the leading danseurs- she had an ‘in’ on every endowment and grant-giving committee in country; every one that mattered, that is. All he had to do was slip into the car and his life would be gold-plated.

“They need me upstairs darling, otherwise you know I’d love to.” Lillian drew her knees together.

“Do you love me, Timothy?” she stretched towards him on the leather seat with the grace natural to a ballerina.

“Forever and always,” he said, “you’re my guiding light.” Lillian smiled, pulled herself upright, then rapped on the glass, signaling she was ready to leave.

“Visit me tomorrow Tim, I have some ideas for the gallery.”

“Of course, Lil!” He shut the door and the black vehicle slipped into the night.

Ox-blood, velvety red. The cold, high ceilings of Lil’s apartment… *Why am I having these thoughts now?* Timothy jerked himself out of the memory. *Why do these thoughts come now, after I’ve been through so much and life is just getting back to normal?* He finished attaching the trailer to his bike hastily, and threw his tools to the side of the garage. *I need distraction. Noise, light. People.*

Timothy found these memories deeply unsettling, because, he told himself, the events of the past 18 months had led him to question if he’d made the right decision when he’d refused Lillian, sold out to Alex and ‘retired’ at 35 to his family home deep in the country.

Fiona was in the kitchen when Timothy came back inside. Delft tiles shone on the splashback behind the farmhouse sink; a large picture window illuminated his wife as she washed dishes. Elsie was back at the

vent-cover.

"Wow, you've got everything packed already!" Fiona said. By the sound of her voice, Tim knew that today would be a good one.

"Sure do, your bike's good to go and I've hooked up the pumpkin for princess." Elsie let out a happy shriek. She'd wanted to ride in the 'pumpkin' since Timothy brought it down from the attic last week. The Cinderella Pumpkin, just like in cartoons. *She might be a little disillusioned after three miles*, Tim thought. He left to pack her carrier onto his bike, just in case.

***

Thanks for reading. Part II is here.

LEAVE A COMMENT

BOTN: THE STORY OF CLARA

Battle of the Nutcrackers: The Story of Clara

At my house, we get a television channel called *Ovation*, and for the last few years they've aired a run-up to Christmas called *Battle of the Nutcrackers*. A different ballet-version of the story is presented every Sunday. Viewers vote for the one that they like best, and it's aired again on Christmas Eve.

As you might expect, the Bolshoi version always features prominently; and I imagine there will be a performance by The Royal Ballet also. The one I saw last night was The Australian Ballet's *Nutcracker: The Story of Clara*.

This story is not a traditional telling of E.T.A Hoffmann's famous work. Instead, Tchaikovsky's music is set to the life story of an elderly *Ballet Russes* (Diaghilev) dancer, who emigrated to Australia. There are two remarkable things about this performance. Firstly, the beginning scenes are danced by older artists, who perform folk-inspired dances. The choreography (by Graeme Murphy) invokes dances from the Russian emigre community, which really touched me, because older Russians are the only people I know of who spontaneously dance- I mean *dance*, not bump-and-grind- at informal social gatherings. My only exception to that rule may be for older Germans, who will polka under the right conditions.

The second remarkable thing is the production's political message. Clara, the story's heroine and a turn-of-the-century ballerina, is in love with a White Army officer, who the Bolsheviks shoot. The Bolsheviks are represented as large rats with red armbands.

In this ballet, traditional Tsarist Russia is romanticized: it's a beautiful world of dance-schools, fashionable boulevards, Imperial courts and national pride. It's the world that birthed Diaghilev's *Ballet Russes*, which is one of the most culturally significant phenomenon to come out of Russia. Personally, I've always loved their costume designs; Kristian Fredrikson channels that company's spirit with this production. (*Clara's Story* is the culmination of The Australian Ballet's *Ballet Russes* research project.)

I was surprised that this historical interpretation would come out of a Commonwealth country; and I can't see it being produced in the USA's current cultural climate. I've come to expect romantic tales of the revolutionaries; or at most, depictions of Tsarist Russia as a society that was born to die.

Instead, Clara's life is presented as a kind of cultural ark, where memories of something, well, *more refined* are preserved.

There may be a third awesome thing about this performance. Clara's soldier's dance reminded me a lot of this… The Bronx (or Seoul!) has nothing on the Soviet Army.

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No playable sources found

Dance holds a more prominent place in Russian culture than it does in the US, especially during Soviet times, and it seems that this tradition

lives on in something called “Jumpstyle”. (Lots of Youtube, check it out.)

Back to the ballet: Clara travels the world with Diaghilev’s ballet; Tchaikovsky’s various dances (Arabian, etc.) become the company’s world-travel experiences. In Egypt we have an ‘*Ey*, *ukhnem*!’ moment with dock-workers and women in abayas; tai-chi in a very uniform and somber China; and WWI- fever in Australia (must be pre-fighting?). Yet, it all works. The story is fast-moving and remains engaging throughout the performance. This is a recording that I’ll save for a long time.

LEAVE A COMMENT

THE STRUGGLE OF WRITING IS OVER

How the anti-establishment keeps it real.

… but the struggle for attention begins.

I am reluctant to feed this monster, but those listening can’t avoid hearing these words:

> *“I knew I wasn’t going to get another good idea, or if I did, I’d have to slave over it.” An interview with Philip Roth about his recent retirement.*

Philip Roth, Grand Poobah of American letters, is teasing us with threats of retirement. The author is in excellent health and publishes regularly. I’ll believe it when he’s dead.

Next.

LEAVE A COMMENT

SWAMPY WOMAN

Thanks to www.birthingthecrone.com

There are still good poets and writers.

When I was younger, I used to shop in stores like Barnes and Noble on Saturday afternoons. I’d look at the different books on the shelves- picking up the ones with flashy covers, usually. I’d always end up buying something written before WWII though, because the new stuff just didn’t do anything for me.

It didn’t take me long to come to the conclusion that there aren’t any good writers anymore.

Well, it is as stupid for me to say that as it is for Orwell to claim that certain political views are inimical to creativity. There are artists everywhere; I just had to move outside of my comfort zone to find them.

The Insomniac’s House is a collection of poems by Lisa J. Cihlar. It’s a booklet that I found hidden on the end of a shelf in our local library. I’d never noticed it there before, but the author wrote “Best Swampy Days” inside the cover and signed it, so I gave the book a try.

From *Swampy Woman on a Gift Giving Occasion*:

The essence of little boys is

in their after-recess hair. A bit of sweat,

a bit of oil, maybe some tears and blood

from when they were knocked off

the jungle gym or took a dare to jump

from the apex of the swing's arc.

Lisa J. Cihlar writes in the persona of 'Swampy Woman,' a Sidhe-like being with a wild streak. While there is something supernatural about Swampy Woman, she's definitely from my part of the world.

From *In Which I Discover Spring Concealed*:

Time again to consider Swampy Woman,

cattails clamped between her jaws,

a barn owl balanced on her shoulder.

She calls him Valentino. It sounds like valentine.

Even in the dark his heart-shaped face smoulders.

Swampy Woman cuts her own green hair

with pinking shears.

She is my mother. My sister. My grandmother.

In winter when snow climbs past sills

I bring tea laced with milk and sugar.

And casseroles.

She tells me she doesn't like them,

will feed them to the lynx

padding in from cedars on moonless starry nights.

He likes hamburger and noodles

mixed with canned soup

and covered with crushed potato chips.

It's possible that there is art which everyone appreciates, but I doubt it. No art is appreciated *in the same way* by everyone. I'm sure that at least half of the people reading this post will think: "hamburger, noodles, canned soup, potato chips- those must be a metaphor for something."

In southern Wisconsin, those ingredients make a meal. The dish is baked like Shepard's Pie, and is what the British would call 'nursery food'. Does this information put a different spin on the poem for you?

I never found anything like *The Insomniac's House* at Barnes and Noble; I found it in a country library, 30 miles from the author's house. Art has a time, a place and a people.

LEAVE A COMMENT

VALERIE ELIOT

Valerie Eliot, wife of poet T.S. Eliot.

Valerie Eliot, T.S. Eliot's widow, died last week. She was nearly forty years younger than the poet; they met working together at Faber and Faber.

The New York Times describes Valerie as Eliot's 'wife and defender', which struck me as interesting: Why should Eliot need a defender?

I found an answer to that question from, my old friend, George Orwell. By the 1940s, Eliot was certainly under attack: Orwell was among the first to draw blood, and by the end of WWII, the attacks had spun into absurd tirades.

Orwell saw Eliot in this light:

*Among the people who praised it [*Tropic of Cancer*] were*

> *T.S. Eliot, Herbert Read, Aldous Huxley, John Dos Passos, Ezra Pound- on the whole, not the writers who are in fashion at the moment. -From* Inside the Whale*, 1940.*

In 1940, nobody wanted to be on a list with Ezra Pound; he was broadcasting material from Fascist Italy that was highly critical of the US and UK governments. *(Correction: Pound hadn't broadcast by 1940; though he made his unorthodox views known through letters, books, articles well before then.)*

But Eliot was not the firebrand that Pound was, so what did Orwell find objectionable about T.S.? From *T.S. Eliot*, 1942:

> *The qualities by which any society which is to last longer than a generation actually has to be sustained- industry, courage, patriotism, frugality, philoprogenitiveness- obviously could not find any place in Eliot's early poems. There was only room for rentier values, the values of people too civilized to work, fight or even reproduce themselves.*

And…

> *Eliot's escape from individualism was into the Church, the Anglican Church as it happened…*
>
> *The Anglo-Catholic movement does not impose any political "line" on its followers, and a reactionary or Austrofascist tendency had always been apparent in his work, especially his prose writings.*

And…

> *But it is arguable that he would have done better to go much further in the direction implied in his famous "Anglo-Catholic and Royalist" declaration. He could not have developed into a Socialist, but he might have developed into the last apologist of aristocracy.*
>
> *Neither feudalism nor indeed Fascism is necessarily deadly to poets, though both are to prose-writers. The thing that is really deadly to both is Conservatism of the half-hearted modern kind.*
>
> *It is at least imaginable that if Eliot had followed wholeheartedly the anti-democratic, anti-perfectionist strain in himself he might have struck a new vein comparable to his earlier tone.*

There were no decent prose writers under feudalism? Who am I to argue with George!

Anyway, Orwell's attack opened the flood gates for less intelligent writers. From *Propaganda and Democratic Speech*, 1944:

> *When recently I protested in print against the Marxist dialect which makes use of phrases like "objectively counter-revolutionary left-deviationism" or "drastic liquidation of petty bourgeois elements," I received indignant letters from lifelong Socialists who told me that I was "insulting the language of the proletariat". In rather the same spirit, Professor Harold Laski devotes a long passage in his book, Faith, Reason and Civilisation, to an attack on Mr. T.S. Eliot, whom he accuses of "writing only for the few." Now, Eliot, as it happens, is one of the few writers of our time who have tried seriously to write English as it is spoken.*

In fairness, Orwell can't criticize Laski without micturating on his own boots, because Laski was a good friend and political partner to Victor Gollancz, Orwell's patron. (Gollancz and Laski founded the Left Book Club together.)

So Eliot isn't *chic* because he isn't revolutionary enough…

T.S. Eliot, Austrofascist and inspiration for *Cats*, the musical.

Not revolutionary enough. This judgement seemed odd to me, because when I was studying literature, T.S. Eliot was one of the few dead white males it was still uncontroversial to read.

Is Eliot kept on student reading lists as an example of why conservative ideas must implode? Maybe, but his work is so witty and humorous that I think readers are more likely to sympathize with Eliot's views than reject them.

I believe that the reason Eliot is still around is that he had a marvelous wife and protector. Valerie was judicious about who she let use

Eliot's work; careful about how she published it; and probably used her influence at Faber and Faber to maximum effect.

Valerie donated some of the money that she earned from Andrew Lloyd Webber's *Cats* to an annual poetry competition in Eliot's honor: prize money to the tune of GBP 15,000. That helped to keep things civil.

The snide attacks on Eliot didn't stop though, even thirty years after his death. From *The New York Times*, Nov. 12th:

> *After her husband's death, Mrs. Eliot was wounded by criticism that he had been cold and self-absorbed, that he had been an anti-Semite, that his treatment of his first wife had been ruthlessly self-serving. She rarely responded publicly, though the release in 1994 of a movie about Eliot's first marriage, "Tom & Viv," starring Willem Dafoe and Miranda Richardson, prompted her to speak out.*
>
> *The film, adapted from a play by Michael Hastings, presented Eliot as the villain of the marriage and suggested that Vivienne Haigh-Wood may have written swaths of "The Waste Land." In a long interview in* The Independent*, Mrs. Eliot defended her husband on every front, even producing copies of letters to refute the film's unflattering assertions, including a scene in which Vivienne pours melted chocolate into the Faber & Faber mailbox after being unable to get into the office.*

How did Mrs. Eliot feel about her husband?

> *"He was made for marriage, he was a natural for it, a loving creature, and great fun, too," Mrs. Eliot said in a 1994 interview. "We used to stay at home and drink Drambuie and eat cheese and play Scrabble. He loved to win at cards, and I always made a point of losing by the time we went to bed."*

Every artist should have a protector like Mrs. Eliot, who died at age 86.

LEAVE A COMMENT

A TRAGIC STORY

I almost don't want to write about this, because the story is so sad. However, the Krim murders remind me of a social problem that I feel I need to talk about, because it's possible that nobody else will.

Perhaps you've heard the story: two children were allegedly stabbed to death by their nanny, Yoselyn Ortega, who then waited for the children's mother, Marina Krim, to return home before Ortega stabbed herself. Yoselyn and Marina had an "epic argument" before the incident, reports *Radar Online*. More details on the fight here.

I don't know the Krims and I've never met Ortega; but I have been exposed to a number of well-to-do families in NYC.

Being a nanny to New York's rich is not an easy job. I was shocked by how many mothers, who appeared forward-thinking and compassionate to their friends and co-workers, turned into capricious, medieval tyrants behind closed doors with their domestic staff. Nannies are targeted in particular, because parents naturally feel demanding when it comes to their children. Even more troubling, these mothers felt that abusing their staff was okay.

No amount of abuse justifies an adult hurting children, but given the prevailing attitude toward domestic staff, I am surprised that enraged outbreaks don't happen more often. Maybe they do, but they don't get the media coverage that this case is getting.

What's even worse, is that nanny-abuse is systematic. NYC families will typically go to a nanny-agency to find their help. If you're a white American born stateside, your chances of finding work through such an agency are are slim to none, in fact, these agencies will openly discourage you from applying. What the agencies want, and what the families ultimately want, is a nanny who hasn't been in America long and who (preferably) comes from a country where there isn't strong labor protection. They are searching for women who expect psychological, physical and economic abuse from their employers; women who don't believe better working environments exist.

When I lived in the Middle East, I wasn't surprised to see this type of attitude toward workers; but I was shocked to find it in the USA. Shows how much I knew.

Physical and emotional abuse are self-explanatory; I'd like to talk about economic abuse, which is the more prevalent type. These nannies earn US$ 40-50k a year. That sounds like good money, until you remember that we're talking about NYC, and you need to make about $70k to be able to afford a small, one-bedroom apartment in an undesirable neighborhood.

The result is that most nannies are on some sort of public assistance or living in cramped conditions with friends. On top of that, they often have their own children to provide for.

The richest New Yorkers' domestic staff are the working poor. They live from hand to mouth and are at the day-to-day mercy of their employers. *I need you to stay longer.. I need housework done… I need you to cover the kids for… We'll be a little late with pay…* Faced with the choices these nannies have, would you dare say "no"? What starts as a favor then becomes routine. $50 k begins to look really, really cheap.

It's not just the New Yorkers. When I lived in DC, the favored nanny-scam was to bring over Russian girls as 'students'; 'students' who would mind the kids. The girls who didn't immediately run away were

sometimes locked in the home, starved or assaulted by the fathers.

This blew my mind: The worst DC offenders (that I heard of) were those whose own grandparents or great-grandparents had come over from Eastern Europe! Surely they would have some compassion for the girls who they exploited? Nope.

Did these Russian girls choose to come over? Yes. Do some NYC nannies choose to remain employed by abusive families? Yes.

The point is that these women think that they have made the best choice possible for themselves. (Maybe they have, given their circumstances.) I've written in a previous post that the new American zeitgeist is choosing the be exploited; but exploitation takes two. Is this the country we want? Where exploitation is not a vice, but considered 'smart'?

What happened to the youngest Krim children is a tragedy; and irrespective of Ortega's working relationship with her boss, what happened to her is a tragedy too. There will be people in the crowd mourning the Krims who are bad employers like those I've described. Let's hope that between the tears there is also some introspection.

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